

Equity in Promotion and Pay in the USMC

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Equity in Promotion and Pay in the USMC

Submitted to Major M.S. Cook CG#13

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Introduction

"Everyone should be treated fairly but not necessarily equally". In this capitalistic system the quote above seems to apply very well. The USMC applies this philosophy throughout its commands: People who work hard deserve special recognition however, some believe that the Marine Corps' equity and promotion system is not fair. The pay and promotion system the Marine Corps has in place does have its faults but it is still the best system because it takes into account various factors mainly overall performance and duty selection which ensures that we retain our best and brightest.

Pay

The Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation "directs financial management requirements, systems and functions for all appropriated working capital, revolving and trust fund activities. In addition, it directs statutory and regulatory financial reporting requirements¹". This regulation defines all of the stipulations that are associated with pay for Department of Defense (DOD) personnel. Internal pay inequity does not really exist due to the way this system works.

¹ Department of Defense 1992

Basic pay is the base line pay an individual receives that is based on his/her rank and time in service. The current pay table for DOD personnel can be found at <http://www.dfas.mil/money/milpay/pay/2004paytable.pdf>.

Looking at this table and take a captain for example, one can see that an O3 with over six years of service will get the basic pay of \$4069.50 a month. Now that's every individual in DOD. There is really no question as to whether there is a pay inequity because the pay has been set. There are particular billets which require more effort and work than others (even those of higher rank) and there are other billets that require more time and effort than mine (even those of lower rank), but the bottom line is despite the billet, everyone in the same rank gets paid the same amount.

Promotion

Promotion to the next rank increases an individual's pay and is decided by a promotion board. However, there are certain service time limitations associated with some rank. For example, if captains do not get promoted to the next rank of Major in a certain amount of time, then they will be forced out of service. Therefore, it is in one's best interests to do the best he/she can to get promoted, one for pay purposes and two for those who want to make it

a career, they must get promoted within their service limitations.

The mission of the Promotion Branch of the Marine Corps is to, "conduct regular boards in order to ensure every Marine (officer and staff noncommissioned officer) has a fair and equitable opportunity for advancement to the next grade. Provide support operations for accurate, timely, and quality service associated with all aspects of the officer and enlisted promotion processes"². There are many procedures that Marines must go through to ensure that they remain competitive for promotion.

The How

The board consists of about twenty-one members who screen an individual's fitness reports and review the billets in which they have served. This is where the type of billet (and where) one served come into play. The fitness report is an evaluation tool that is used to measure one's performance (Marine Corps Performance and Evaluation System)³. It is a combination of two of the performance appraisal systems, the trait system and comparison system.⁴ These two systems are used widely in the civilian sector but they are rarely combined as they are

² Marine Corps Manpower Management, 2003

³ Marine Corps Performance and Evaluation System, 2003

⁴ Martocchio, 2001. p. 135

here in the USMC's example. The trait system analyzes certain traits such as performance, leadership under stress, developing subordinates, education, etc. The comparison system involves the ranking of individuals in an organization against one another.

The job description is key because a major section of the fitness report deals specifically with duties performed. In this section the Reporting Senior (RS) and Marine Reported On (MRO) will document the duties/responsibilities. The RS will measure and outline the accomplishments of that MRO based on the billet description. (Within fifteen days of a new RS to MRO relationship, the RS must outline the job description to that MRO.)

The Manpower Branch of the Marine Corps conducts the job analysis and makes evaluations regarding the billets. They determine if the billets involve more effort, time, intellect, stress, etc. Another important factor is where the billet is located. Marines are expected to serve overseas or to serve on deployable units. Those individuals who continuously obtain billets that are in the United States and who have been non-deployable will lose status in relation to other Marines who have served overseas regardless of performance.

The Promotion Branch will see where a particular Marine has served, and they will take into account the analyses and evaluations that have been conducted by Manpower. This is where they align one's performance in respect to the billet. Manpower has determined, for example, that being a Drill Instructor merits special consideration. Those individuals receive priority over others even if their overall performance does not look as good as that of someone else. Marines are also supposed to seek diverse billets. Individuals who choose to remain in certain billets may hurt their chance for promotion.

Throughout a Marine's career, he/she will have several RSSs and Reviewing Officers (RO). The RO is two levels up from the MRO. The board will look at how each of the RS's ranked the designated Marine in relation to other Marines that the RS observed in that rank. They will also consider how the RO compared that MRO to other Marines in that same rank. The RO has a "Christmas" tree on which he/she will place the MRO. The board will look at the patterns associated with this Marine. If a Marine continuously receives high marks from each of his RSS's and he is constantly near the top of the ROs' Christmas trees, then the board can probably make a pretty good assumption regarding this Marine's performance.

Moreover, if a Marine performs well constantly, chances are his/her profile will look pretty good. If there is a case of low performance with respect to one RS, the overall trend is what will be looked at. The board knows that every now and then a personality conflict or will arise. Again, they are more concerned with overall trends. In addition to this, Marines must also do many things on their own to ensure they are on track for promotion. For example, they must maintain a good physical fitness score, good rifle and pistol scores, maintain a good military appearance (a photo must be submitted to the board), finish their required Professional Military Education (PME) etc. This also ensures that there is equity, because it is the individual Marine's responsibility to ensure he/she can do the best they can as individuals to comply/excel at these requirements. Often individuals do not get promoted because they are deficient in these areas or they omit them completely. The board will not even look at a package if there is a fitness report gap. It is the individual Marine's responsibility to ensure that there is a complete chronological history of his/her performance available to the board.

The Key

The key to getting promoted is performing well in any billet. The mission of Manpower is to address the needs of the Marine Corps. The individual's needs are second to that. Most of the time the individual's and Marine Corps' needs meet somewhere in the middle. Manpower does a good job at ensuring they offer the variety of billets that are required for an individual to remain diverse. Performing well by always accomplishing the mission and taking care of one's Marines along with ensuring that one remains deployable and diverse is the key to promotion. It is not a mystery and most of the time when someone does get passed over, it is easy to determine why and has little to do with inequity and more to do with that individual's choices and/or unsatisfactory performance trends.

Another System?

The current system in place for promotion is as fair as it can be. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule but this has to do with being human. Sometimes people should not be promoted and vice versa. It does happen but not often. The current system that is in place does an outstanding job. The argument has been made in regards to just using someone's statistics but there is much more to a Marine than just whether he can run fast, shoot well, take

good tests, look good in uniform, etc. Whether he/she can lead Marines is the key and that is what the current system addresses, an overall picture.

Conclusion

One might feel as though they rate more pay than someone senior in rank to them, but the bottom line is that is the pay system that the individuals signed up for. The Promotion Branch does a pretty good job at ensuring equity in the promotion system. As was demonstrated, the promotion process falls on that individual Marine. He/she must perform and remain diverse to be competitive for promotion. They must also ensure that the job description used for evaluation is clear and understood by both parties. The Manpower division assigns individuals based on the needs of the Marine Corps. They conduct the job analysis and evaluation of certain billets to determine which ones merit more consideration than others. Manpower also do an excellent job of ensuring they fulfill the needs of the Marine Corps and keep Marines competitive for promotion by offering the right billets. There are cases of inequity that arise, but that will happen in any system that has human involvement. For the most part though, performance in the leading of Marines and remaining diverse

and on top of your personal statistics will almost assuredly lead to promotion to the next rank.

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